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SUBJECT: 2009 OSAC CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT - ST. PETERSBURG

OSAC CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT 2009 - ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

Overall Crime and Safety

As in many large cities, street crimes such as pick-pocketing, mugging and auto theft are fairly common in St. Petersburg. The incidence of violent hate crimes has risen during the last several years and continues to constitute a serious threat for racial, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities. Organized crime and corruption also remain significant issues for foreign businesses and tourists in the city. The threat of terrorism remains a concern despite a lack of significant terrorist activity in recent years. Police corruption hinders the city's efforts to increase the general level of safety.

General Crime

There have been no significant changes in the level of street crime in St. Petersburg during the past year.

Americans, like most foreigners in St. Petersburg, are easily recognized as such and have been the victims of robberies and assaults in both tourist areas and residential neighborhoods. Many attacks occurred during daylight hours and in well-populated areas. Bystanders rarely came to the aid of victims. The use of edged weapons is more common than the use of firearms in the commission of such crimes, although firearms remain accessible to criminals in St. Petersburg. A popular tactic of criminals is to file down the edge of a Russian coin to razor-sharpness, which allows the coin to be used as an edged weapon while still providing the criminal with a pretext for its possession if apprehended by police.

Criminals are attracted to areas frequented by foreign tourists and business travelers. Nevsky Prospect, Peter and Paul Fortress, the Hermitage, St. Isaac's Cathedral, Church on the Spilt Blood, Artists' Square and the Mariinsky Theater are all targeted by pickpockets and other petty criminals. Petty criminals also target the public transport system. The Gostiny Dvor subway station, in particular, is the site of a spate of pick-pocketings and muggings. Recently, the criminals have carefully targeted their victims, pursuing those with expensive, high-end cameras. It is believed that the Gostiny Dvor pick-pocketing ring is backed by the Russian police in an arrangement known as a "roof" (krisha) protection racket. Nevertheless, the subway, trolley and bus systems remain the safest and best regulated of St. Petersburg's public transport options. Unlicensed taxis, or "gypsy cabs," and minibuses (marshrutki) are considered to be more dangerous both in terms of the likelihood of crime and traffic safety.

Some areas of St. Petersburg, while historically important and popular with some tourists, remain even more dangerous than mainstream tourist attractions. Sennaya Square and Apraksin Dvor are two such locations. Both areas are characterized by poor lighting, transient populations, and low-end businesses.

"Gypsy crime" or "Roma crime" is a specific kind of street crime common to St. Petersburg. It involves large groups of Roma (an ethnic minority pejoratively referred to as "gypsies") who aggressively swarm and distract their intended victims with various artifices in order to grab purses, wallets and other

valuables. One notable technique, the "baby drop," involves pushing an infant into a victim's arms and then fleecing the victim's pockets as the victim holds on to the infant. While these crimes are not necessarily violent, resistance by victims can result in the use of violent force by assailants. Roma crime groups usually operate with "muscle" hidden around corners or in nearby crowds.

Drink druggings are still a source of concern in St. Petersburg.

These crimes usually involve the surreptitious placement of an incapacitating drug in a victim's drink. The victim may be distracted by a co-conspirator, such as an attractive woman, while the drugs are surreptitiously introduced into the victim's drink. The co-conspirator then suggests that the victim accompany her (or him) to a car or hotel room, where the victim succumbs to the drugs and is robbed. Such drugging usually occur at bars and nightclubs frequented by tourists. While most druggings occur in low-end establishments, some incidents have been recorded in the city's best bars and nightclubs. It is advisable to order only bottled drinks, ensure the drinks are opened in one's own presence, and maintain control of the drinks at all times in order to minimize the risk of being drugged. In the event of a drugging, the victim should seek immediate medical attention. Criminals constantly experiment with the chemicals used in the drinks, and new variations with different side-effects may appear.

The most alarming criminal trend in the St. Petersburg area has been the rise in reporting of pedophilia and sexual molestation of children cases. While these crimes were limited to Russian residents of St. Petersburg and may not have a direct impact on foreign travel and business, Russian media gave considerable coverage to the growing threat of crimes against children.

Contacts express concern that the global economic downturn will cause a rise in crime. One result of the economic downturn has been a slowdown or halt of work in the construction sector. Many of those being turned out of work are young male immigrants from ex-Soviet Central Asia or the Caucasus, often without proper documentation and therefore with no access to any sort of social safety net. While statistics have been scarce, it is feared that poverty and discrimination could lead the newly unemployed to resort to criminal activity.

(II) Terrorism

In August of 2007, a high-speed train returning to St. Petersburg from Moscow derailed near Novgorod. 60 passengers were injured and 1 passenger was killed. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) declared the derailment a terrorist act and took control of the investigation. To date, no one has been prosecuted for the derailment, although several arrests have been made. Doubts linger as to whether the derailment was actually a terrorist attack, or merely the result of poor track maintenance.

FSB also investigated a reported threat to assassinate St. Petersburg governor Valentina Matvienko. There have been no reports on the veracity of the threat and no subsequent media reports on the investigation's progress. Recently all suspects were acquitted.

In October of 2008, authorities reported that they were looking for a vehicle reportedly full of explosives near the mosque in St. Petersburg. A thorough search of the city resulted in the vehicle, with the explosives, being located far from the intended target. No additional information has been reported and the group behind this possible attack has not been identified.

Aside from these incidents, there have been no major terrorist incidents, or suspected terrorist incidents, in recent years. However, St. Petersburg is home to many ethnic and religious minorities that may sympathize with terrorist groups in Russia's Caucasian region. Tensions surrounding the loyalties and sympathies of St. Petersburg's 40,000 Muslims combine with Russian xenophobia to create an atmosphere of racial tension and suspicion. This is particularly true in light of the 2008

military conflict with Georgia, which spawned many incidents of discrimination locally.

In reality, the few instances of low-level "terrorist" activity in St. Petersburg, such as pipe-bombings, have been revealed to be part of hate crimes or organized crime activity. In October of 2007, a pipe bomb was thrown onto a stage during a concert at a local nightclub. No one was injured, and several local skinheads were revealed to be behind the attack.

(III) Political Violence

Police and government security agencies maintain tight control over dissident political groups and protests. Dissident political groups must obtain city permits in order to march or assemble. Police presence at such protests is overwhelming and includes hundreds of riot police, riot-control vehicles, and even helicopters. The majority of protests are peaceful, however, a dissident march along Nevsky Prospekt in early 2007 was violently dispersed by riot police.

The US Consulate was the target of several peaceful political protests during 2008. The majority of these protests occurred during the Russian/Georgian conflict and in some cases resulted in a "Flash Mob" - incidents when a demonstration occurs without apparent (or easily monitored) communication; such as through the use of SMS messaging. To this date, these types of demonstrations attract smaller crowds and quickly disperse without incident.

(IV) Russian Organized Crime

Although two children of a prominent real estate mogul were kidnapped and released without payment of ransom in 2007, kidnappings in Russia are rare, and likely associated with organized crime. Hostile economic takeovers of local and foreign-owned businesses continue to constitute a major security issue in St. Petersburg.

Organized crime groups continue to run protection rackets with impunity. In fact, it is believed that Russian law enforcement agencies run their own protection rackets. The 2007 arrest of Vladimir Barsukov, a/k/a Vladimir Kumarin, of the Tambov crime family, was handled by top-level FSB officials due to concerns

about local police collusion with organized crime. The Tambov, Kazan, and Malyshev crime families are the three major criminal organizations in St. Petersburg. Organized criminal activity in St. Petersburg extends into business, banking, public services, natural resources, and even art and culture. Virtually all businesses in St. Petersburg have a krisha (protection scheme, lit. "roof") provided by organized crime.

Each year, many foreign businesses experience significant problems with organized crime including extortion, blackmail, and protection rackets. Joint business ventures, in particular, can be targeted by Russian organized crime. However, exact statistics on this issue are difficult to obtain. It is advisable to exercise caution and diligence in establishing business activities in St. Petersburg. Proactive security planning and thorough screening of prospective partners and employees are essential practices for foreign businesses in Russia.

(V) Russian Police (Militia)

Police corruption in Russia remains a major problem. While police coverage of the city is fairly comprehensive, with dozens of substations, and radio cars trolling almost every street, woefully poor pay, passivity and corruption greatly undermine the effectiveness of law enforcement in St. Petersburg. Motorists routinely bribe their way out of traffic violations, and victims of crime are likely to find themselves confronted by bureaucratic and unmotivated detectives.

Russian police maintain a special police unit for crimes affecting foreigners, although this unit's operational capability is questionable. Very few police officers speak

English. Russian police conduct frequent documents checks, especially of minorities and foreigners. Foreigners are required to carry their passports, with valid visas and registration stamps, at all times. Document problems are a frequent source of police harassment for foreigners and leave foreigners open to the solicitation of bribes by police officers.

Crimes committed under color of authority, that is, crimes committed by police officers or those dressed as police officers, also continue to be a major problem in St. Petersburg.

While foreigners should always comply with police document checks, it is advisable to note the names, badge numbers, and vehicle numbers of any police present. There have been several instances where police, or individuals dressed as police, used document checks as a pretext for robbery. In 2008, one American reported that while reporting an attempted pickpocketing, police made photocopies of credit cards.

(VI) If You Are the Victim of a Crime ~

The US Consulate General continues to advise that Americans report crimes immediately to the Russian police and the American Citizen Services section of the Consulate. Russian police usually do render basic assistance. It is recommended to file an official police report, especially when an American passport has been stolen. Crimes can be reported to the nearest police precinct or by calling the "Militia Bureau for Crimes Committed By and Against Foreigners." In instances of police inaction, detention or harassment, Americans should immediately contact the Consulate for assistance.

St. Petersburg emergency numbers operate 24 hours day:

Fire: 01
Police: 02
Ambulance: 03
Militia (Police) Unit for Foreigners: 278-3014

Medical Issues Related to Crime and Safety

The Russian medical system is slowly recovering from a state of near collapse. There are no government-run hospitals in St. Petersburg that provide full Western medical care, although several private clinics offer care comparable to Western standards. These clinics also have English-speaking doctors and accept some US insurance, although patrons are advised to pay strict attention to the procedures conducted and billed.

American Medical Clinic: 78 Moika nab., tel: 740-2090
(www.amclinic.com)

EuroMed: 60 Suvorovskiy pr., tel: 327-0301 (www.euromed.ru)

MEDEM : 6 Marata ul., tel: 336-3333 (www.iscpb.com)

These clinics can also arrange for medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) to Western Europe, however, this is very expensive. The closest MEDEVAC point is Helsinki, Finland.

The US Consulate advises travelers who have chronic illnesses or who are infirm to consider the standard of medical care and the costs of medical evacuation before traveling to St. Petersburg. The Consulate further recommends that all travelers to Russia obtain temporary traveler's medical insurance with coverage for medical evacuation.

(VII) Tips for Avoiding Crime~

-Be particularly alert to your surroundings and guard your belongings in restaurants, overcrowded public transportation, and other high-density tourist areas. In St. Petersburg, tourists should be particularly alert in the vicinity of Gostiniy Dvor, along Nevsky Prospect and its underground passages, Palace Square, Mars Field, surrounding areas of St. Isaac's Cathedral, the train and Metro stations, food markets, flea markets, and the Mariinsky and Mussorgsky theaters.

-When walking about, leave hard-to-replace non-essential items such as credit cards, driver's licenses, association membership cards, and family pictures with hotel safe deposit boxes or at home.

-Never display large sums of money. Disperse your money throughout your garments. Remember the amounts in each location and when making purchases, retrieve only the amount of money needed for that purchase.

-Beware of street vendors that seek to distract you.

-Be alert for groups of teenagers or young street children who may quickly approach and assault you.

-Exercise caution when visiting nightclubs and other late-night establishments. A number of establishments are owned and frequented by organized criminal syndicates. These include casinos and adult clubs.

-At nightclubs and bars beware of strangers inviting you to drink at their table, particularly when they provide the alcohol. Never accept a beverage in an open container from a stranger or recent acquaintance. Keep an eye on your drink at all times.

-Be cautious when considering purchase of an antique from a street vendor or any source. Failure to obtain export permission could result in confiscation of the item, detention and/or payment of a sizable fine.

-Do not exchange money from street vendors, as legal currency exchange offices are widely available in St. Petersburg and northwest Russia.

-Never lose sight of your credit card when paying for items or services. The employees of some establishments have been known to "double swipe" credit cards.

-Avoid using ATM cards if possible. Each year, thousands of cases of ATM fraud are reported throughout Russia.

-Women should be aware that sexual assaults are as commonplace in St. Petersburg as they are in most large urban areas in the U.S.

-Russian authorities require that foreigners carry their passports and registered visas with them at all times. Travelers should be aware that loss of a passport requires both a newly issued passport and a Russian exit visa in order to depart the country.

-No traveler should seek to import or use GPS equipment in any manner unless it is properly and fully documented before arrival and is declared in full on a customs declaration at the point of entry to the Russian Federation.

-All American citizens either visiting or residing in St. Petersburg and northwest Russia are encouraged to register at the American Consulate General.

Transportation

-Many people in St. Petersburg flag down private vehicles for rides and pay the driver to transport them to their destination. This is a high-risk form of transportation that should be avoided.

-Motorists should also be aware that observance of posted traffic rules varies widely.

-Motorists should avoid travel after dark in the countryside outside of St. Petersburg and throughout northwest Russia.

-There is a no-tolerance policy for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. It is possible to be arrested for driving while intoxicated after only one drink.

-Trains between St. Petersburg and Moscow continue to experience occasional robberies of compartments left unattended or not secured. When traveling on overnight trains, secure the door to

your compartment to guard against unauthorized access.

American Business Community

-American businesses planning to operate in St. Petersburg should consider the full spectrum of security issues before establishing operations. This includes the possible hiring of guard services, installation of technical security systems, and systematic evaluation of the reliability of Russian business partners and associates.

-Russian partners and locally hired staff should be selected only after detailed screening and background checks. American businesspeople may be held liable for the actions of their Russian business partners who later prove to be associated with, or have contacts with, organized crime. Additionally, American businesspeople should be alert to the danger of extortion threats (or worse) from their Russian business partners.

-American businesses may need to consider hiring a local security firm to provide guards to protect premises and personnel. However, particular attention should be paid to the choice of a local security firm. The "License Unit" of the GUV D (St. Petersburg Police) is responsible for licensing all private security companies that operate in the city.

-Installing technical security systems, especially intrusion alarm systems to protect office equipment and business information, should be considered.

-American businesspeople should also take into account the vulnerability to eavesdropping devices and individuals with extensive training in human intelligence operations seeking trade secrets.

-American businesspeople who utilize local services for banking, security, and medical treatment should limit the information provided to these institutions.

(IIX) For Further Information~

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